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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000276

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE
AFRICOM FOR J00, J01, J2, J5

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#) [FR](#) [SP](#) [TP](#)
SUBJECT: GABON THE DAY AFTER: LIBREVILLE QUIET, SUCCESSION
PROCESS BEGINS

REF: GABON 00271

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Summary

¶1. (U) The post-Omar Bongo era has begun. Prime Minister Eyeghe Ndong returned to Libreville from Barcelona to push along the constitutionally-mandated succession process. Following the articles of succession in the constitution, the Council of Ministers unanimously voted to refer the question of vacancy in the Presidency to the Constitutional Court. Defense Minister Ali Ben Bongo remains in poor health, but involved in &cabinet-level meetings. Libreville is calm, with many Gabonese deciding to stay at home. The airport is open, and no curfew is in effect. End Summary.

Constitutional Succession Process Begun

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Jean Eyeghe Ndong returned from Barcelona today and has taken ad-hoc leadership of the government. The Prime Minister launched the constitutionally-mandated succession process by convening the Council of Ministers. In the afternoon the Ministers of Gabon, lead by the Prime Minister, unanimously voted to refer the issue of succession to the Constitutional Court. There have been multiple statements supporting the rule of law and constitution. Defense Minister Ali Ben Bongo, Minister of Communication Laure Olga Gondjaut, and Minister of the Interior Andre Mba Obame all made statements in public support of the constitution. During a local TV report on the Council of Ministers meeting, the narrator noted that Gabon was the &political exception in a region of violence and the country,s laws would be respected.

¶3. (U) The Constitutional Court is expected to declare the Presidency vacant, which will officially transfer limited powers of the Presidency to the President of the Senate, Rose Francine Rogombe. Rogombe then has up to 45 days to organize an election to fill the Presidency. The Court has deliberated questions concerning previous legislative and presidential election results.

¶4. (U) Defense Minster Ali Ben Bongo, who is also the son of deceased President Omar Bongo, is in Libreville. However, his level of political activity has been subdued over the last month due to an unspecified intestinal illness. Ali Ben Bongo did appear on Gabonese TV in the evening of June 8 to

call for calm and reiterate that the borders were closed and the military was on alert. Ali Ben Bongo looked ill and to have lost weight in his recent television appearances.

¶15. (U) Cabinet Secretary Pascaline Bongo, daughter of the deceased president, remains in Barcelona. Family members are expected to return to Libreville with the President's body on June 12.

The Funeral

¶16. (U) The Embassy received a Dipnote on June 9 regarding the funeral arrangements. The Government of Gabon announced that the funeral will occur on June 16. They have requested that delegations be limited to 15 people and that the delegations arrive and depart the day of the funeral.

Security Situation is Stable

¶17. (U) Libreville is calm as the city respects the first day of a 30-day mourning period. There is a slight increase in police and para-military gendarmerie on the streets. There are no reported protests or political gatherings.

¶18. (U) There is no curfew in Gabon, despite rumors on June 8. Many local residents chose to stay home today. Public and most private schools were open. However, due to a continuing pay dispute between the government and teachers, there were no teachers available (and it is unlikely there would have been even without the death of President Bongo).

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¶19. (U) The government of nearby Sao Tome and Principe announced a 3-day mourning period. There is no change to daily life.

Cross-Border Traffic Resumes

¶10. (U) Embassy Contacts in the Gabonese Department for Customs and Immigration tell us that the borders and airport have reopened. Officials with Air France and Gabon Airlines say they expect to resume normal operations by June 10.

Comment

¶11. (U) The question of "who's in charge" has been answered for the time being with the return of the Prime Minister and other cabinet-level officials. Much effort appears to have been made to demonstrate that Gabon is still functioning, and that a constitutional process is underway and being respected by major players in Gabon's political scene.

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